

Participant Orientation

Introduction

Background

Leaders in the therapeutic community (TC) model of treatment have identified a critical need for entry-level staff training in the basics of the TC model.¹ In response, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT) convened an expert panel in 2000 to serve as a planning committee for a generic TC curriculum (TCC) and to provide guidance during its development (see appendix A for a list of expert panel members and appendix B for a list of other contributors). This document is the result of that collaboration.

TCs have evolved to serve an ever-increasing range of special populations with substance use disorders, including women with children, older adults, adolescents, people with co-occurring mental disorders, people with HIV/AIDS, people who are homeless, and people involved with the criminal justice system. In addition, the TC approach has been passed down rather informally through succeeding generations of TC program staff, allowing a shift away from the foundations of the TC model² and necessitating a concrete and standardized method of training both clinical and nonclinical staff.

In an interview with *Therapeutic Communities of America News*, the Director of CSAT, H. Westley Clark, M.D., J.D., M.P.H., CAS, FASAM, advised that, as the TC model continues to evolve, TC practitioners and administrators should stay anchored to the essential premises of TCs so that changes are based on “your [TC practitioners'] own information, your own traditions, your own histories so you don't get fads . . . [but] progressions that are logical, sustained, and meaningful.”³

The TCC was developed to facilitate such logical and meaningful evolution of the TC model by providing TC staff members with an understanding of the essential components and methods of the TC and helping them understand and appreciate that they are part of a long tradition of *community* as a method of treatment.

Language

In presenting generic TC concepts and methods, TCC developers use terms that are accepted widely in TCs. In some cases, several alternative terms (provided by TCC reviewers) are included. You may find that your TC uses terms that differ from those used in the TCC.

Although the number of outpatient programs using the TC model is increasing, most TC programs remain residential. For this reason, developers use the word “resident” throughout the document rather than TC “participant,” “member,” or “client.”

TCC Goals and Objectives

Goals:

- \$ To provide a common knowledge base for all staff members working in TCs
- \$ To encourage you to work on your professional growth and development.

Objectives: As you progress through the TCC training, you will

- \$ Understand and be able to explain
 - The history, basic concepts, and components of the TC
 - The TC views of the disorder, the person, recovery, and right living
 - The social structure and physical environment of the TC
 - The TC treatment methods
 - The ways in which staff members help residents change their behavior, attitudes, and self-identity through the community-as-method and the self-help and mutual self-help learning processes
 - The expectations, roles, and competencies of all staff members
- \$ Experience increased self-awareness
- \$ Be able to identify concerns about your roles and the ways to obtain additional information, support, or training
- \$ Experience and understand the TC process through participation in simulations and role plays of TC methods
- \$ Experience an enhanced sense of belonging to a TC.

The TCC Learning Approach

The 11 modules in the TCC can be delivered over several consecutive days or can be offered over the course of several weeks or months. Each module also can be used separately to target a specific training need. Your trainer will provide you with a specific agenda.

The TCC learning approach includes

- \$ A mixture of presentations, discussions, and exercises to simulate the self-help and mutual self-help learning processes used in TCs.
- \$ Frequent use of a static small-group exercise format.
- \$ Simulations and role plays to understand better the TC method.
- \$ Time to reflect on and write your thoughts and feelings in a personal journal. *This journal is yours to keep; your trainer will not collect it, and you will not be expected to share what you have written unless you choose to do so.*
- \$ An assessment of your learning to be completed in your small groups at the end of each session.
- \$ A wrapup exercise to help make the transition home or back to work on a positive note.
- \$ Brief “prework” assignments to prepare for the next session.

The TCC is not an immersion approach but can complement your agency's immersion training. You will find that the TCC is highly interactive but that it is more didactic than the immersion trainings you may have experienced. The developers have tried to balance presentations and exercises, and your trainer will allow you to take breaks as needed.

Experiential exercises and group simulations can trigger emotional responses. Your trainer will provide basic support and guidance appropriate to a training situation as issues arise during the training but will *not* be able to provide individual counseling. If you feel that you need more support, you can

- \$ Talk to a coworker, friend, or family member
- \$ Talk to a sponsor or therapist
- \$ Request referral to your program's employee assistance program.

The TCC is an entry-level training to familiarize new staff members with basic TC principles and methods. *It does not take the place of immersion or other clinical skills training or ongoing clinical supervision.*

Overview of the Participant's Manual

Each module of your Participant's Manual includes

- \$ PowerPoint slides printed three to a page with space for you to write notes
- \$ Resource Sheets containing additional information, case studies, and exercises
- \$ A summary of the main points of each module
- \$ A learning assessment to complete with your small group (the module review).

Your trainer will give you a notebook to use as your personal journal.

Getting the Most From Your Training Experience

Here are suggestions to get the most from the TC training:

- ☐ Speak to your supervisor before the training begins. Find out what his or her expectations are for you.
- ☐ Think about what you want to learn from each module.
- ☐ Come to each session prepared, do any prework that was assigned, and review the summaries for the modules to be presented.
- ☐ Be an active participant. Participate in the exercises, ask questions, write in your journal, and think about what additional information you want.
- ☐ Speak to your supervisor after the training. Talk to him or her about what you learned to be sure you understand how the information relates to your job.
- ☐ Discuss with your supervisor ways that you can put your learning into practice, and continue to follow up with him or her.
- ☐ Have fun!

¹ De Leon, G. *Therapeutic Communities: Theory, Model and Method*. New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc., 2000. Chapter 1, page 6.

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³ Therapeutic communities and high functioning: An interview with Dr. H. Westley Clark, Director of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. *Therapeutic Communities of America News*, Spring/Summer 1999.